

Hand, foot, mouth disease: What you need to know right now

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Hand, foot and mouth disease is in the news with Yankees pitcher J.A. Happ becoming the second Major League Baseball pitcher afflicted in recent weeks. Mets pitcher Noah Syndergaard was the first player to get felled by the ailment, reportedly after visiting a children's camp. But doctors say it's vital to understand that the group most vulnerable to this sickness is children under 10.

Unfortunately, this viral illness, which is highly contagious and often painful, is on the rise just as parents start to think about sending the kids back to school, which is a prime place to catch it. Doctors are advising parents to be careful and to make sure their children know how to prevent contracting the disease.

"It's picked up easily in day care centers, especially," according to Dr. Trachella Johnson Foy, a family physician for Baptist Health in Jacksonville, Fla., told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. "Of course, with us getting back to school—the elementary school children are going to be at a high risk."

Generally consisting of a fever, a general malaise, blister-like lesions and a red rash that develops in the mouth or sores on the hands and feet, the sickness usually runs its course in three to five days. As the Mayo Clinic cites, people hit with the virus are most contagious during the first week, but it can remain in the body for weeks after symptoms and signs are gone. Adults can often pass the virus (by coughing or sneezing) without showing any symptoms of the ailment.

For Lindsay Schroedter, whose whole family has been struck ill at the same time, the misery started when her son Aidan, 8, came home with little red spots that looked like bug bites after playing at the park.

"He had a fever," says the mother of two. "Then next day the 'bug bites' appeared all over his hands and feet and he had a [sore throat](#). Then the fever went away and the spots blistered. He had a hard time walking because of the blisters on the soles of his feet. A few weeks later my daughter got it."

Now they all have it, including Schroedter's mother and husband, whose throat is so inflamed he is having trouble eating.

"The skin is peeling off our hands as though we are shedding our winter coat. It's gross," says Schroedter, who says she probably got it from her baby daughter Avery, 1. "My daughter kisses us all the time and shares our drinks so I'm sure that's how my mom and I got it from her."

Prevention is simple, although it's just the sort of thing kids have trouble remembering to do. Washing your hands carefully is a key part of not spreading the virus. Cover your face when you cough or sneeze and never share food and drinks. Parents and teachers are also advised to disinfect common areas regularly, including shared items such as toys because the virus can live on these objects for days.

Keep in mind that it's very important to stay home from school or work if you think you may have it to prevent the outbreak from widening.

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